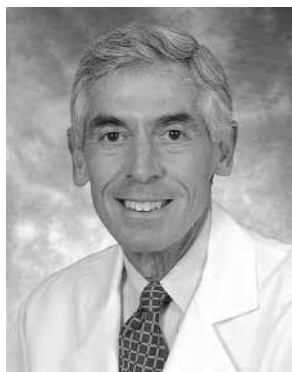


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Electronic submission, electronic review: Better for authors and reviewers . . . ultimately

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A few months ago, reviewers for the *Journal* were startled to receive an E-mail message offering them the opportunity to review an article, seeking their availability, and offering a Web site at which they could log in and initiate their electronic review. Associate editors began receiving articles submitted to the *Journal* with the request that they visit a Web site, log on, and assign reviewers. Some few weeks later, reviews started coming in over the Internet, decisions were made and transmitted electronically, and authors received electronic mail suggesting revisions to their work.

Shortly thereafter, the editorial office began receiving more articles via the Internet, reviews, revisions, and a host of telephone calls and E-mail messages using symbols and alphabetic portrayals that were not always flattering. Thus, a new system was born. We anticipate huge benefits to everyone involved in the submission-review-publication cycle, but we are going to have to grow into the changes. We are, in fact, the crash-test dummies for a system only recently developed and the first of our publisher's journals to go live with it. We are learning as we go, and the programmers are working hard to keep up with our special needs. We beg for your patience should you experience more than a few rough edges in the process. It will be worth it.

The system is good for the authors. They do not have to submit their work via mail or couriers, saving both time and money. They have the comfort of knowing that their work is rapidly sent out for review. When reviews are returned, the information is transmitted to the authors equally fast.

The system is good for the reviewers and good for the editors. When a manuscript arrives for assignment of a reviewer, coding generates a long list of reviewers with acknowledged expertise. Reviews are distributed among more individuals because human memory is not required to think of suitable individuals. When a reviewer is chosen, the assignment is made with full knowledge of how many outstanding reviews that person has, his or her average turn-around time, and the number of reviews the person has done that week.

The system is good for both reviewers and authors. By averaging the workload over more reviewers, the probability of more rapid response is increased. More surgeons are given the opportunity to serve as reviewers. The answers are returned to authors more quickly. We can receive, review, and make a decision on a "brief communication" within one or two weeks. Our limiting factor becomes only the speed at which the publisher can get the material into print (more about that in another editorial).

The process saves money for authors, reviewers, and the editorial office. The potential for error that occurs with repetitive handling of paper is diminished, and important savings on mailings and personnel are realized. We can focus on our most important mission . . . content.

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You may have discovered the system to be far from perfect in this embryonic phase. Occasionally figures disappear into hyperspace, articles become truncated, and reviews end up in the wrong box. All of these problems are correctable by the people in the editorial office, who are committed to setting the highest possible standards for our *Journal*. Establishing a completely electronic manuscript

submission/review system is a high priority for our *Journal*. Six months from now, we hope authors, reviewers, and editors will wonder why it took so long to get to this intuitively obvious point. Authors should delight at seeing their work in print sooner, and all our readers will reap the benefits that accrue to more rapid dissemination of important information.

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